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departure

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VOLUME FOUR NUMBER TEN

NORMAN MacCAIG

Conjunctions

Intercessions fall between
The grass and its decisive green
And hands of mercy weigh the light
Bird with the selfhood of its flight.

Gestures of a will confound
The shuddering of the dying ground
And with a frozen passion lock
The crystals of the shaking rock.

The thing and its idea stare
Outwardly on anywhere,
The space between them closed by these
Holy interferences.

While with a logos for disguise
They burn across our human eyes
And deafen our dull ears with what
Is claptrap thunder of a thought.

The shining unities, behind
This storm that rages in the mind,
Make it and us one thing, to prove
The mystery of their wintry love.

ALAN BROWNJOHN

Fires

There have been times when fire was in the lines, and
In the mornings, nothing left but cinders,
Showing how vain it was. On days like that
You seem to narrow in scope, your area dwindles

To a small, single point — the failure
To catch love, landscape, fable, anything.
All that is left is saying this, and
' Failure to write ' becomes the only theme.

And this acts as a funnel for your thoughts:
To it, the dwindling mass of sand shifts down
And vanishes, grain by grain — only to form
Beyond that narrowest place, a growing heap.

Diminishing to where remain no choices
Other than silence, themes you have lost begin
To gather strength from fear, and come alive
In unexpected colour, candour, power.

Rhythms compel; your words convince at least
Your own imagination. Therefore, begin:
Out of this fire, one small and hovering coal
Falls suddenly to the hearth. Its smoke winds out

Across the room. Her careful, vigilant hand
Moves down, replacing it. (Is the chance come,
Courage regained, to go on, trace whose hand
It was, depict a love you once left dumb?)

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

The Prodigal

In what house then after so many winters
Did you lie down at ease alone at last?
Certainly not where any echoes could
Reach you through shreds of silences from home.
    What colour had remorse
That it at last stared back from every landscape?

Slowly, slowly like sun coming up
You turned towards those echoes and those shadows.
Not soft persuasive strings but cries of children
Whimpered their way across those several countries
    (Your own first voice returning),
And drew you like a man who goes to harvest.

And home at last where every silence drew
A circle round old sorrows, old regrets,
Your father summoned you along the path
Where often you had fallen, and you came
    Like the child's cries which fetch
Mothers from labour, fathers from every anger.

DENNIS KEENE

Sonnet

Turned back from places that are not yet seen
eyes seek for less light, hope that shadows will
soften the image of what might have been
to a blank sleep; and thus all will be well.

But always wrong, I know, to want that dark
which drowns familiar landscapes, while it forms
a mirror for deception in these calms,
reflecting just myself; so when I wake

Narcissus gropes into a shallow pool,
embracing arms that drag him to the grave.

For tragedies come mostly to that grove
where none observes the actions of a fool,
and in these darkened places curtains fall
never with plaudits or displays of grief.

ANTHONY THWAITE

The Conversion

Had I not met and praised you, not believing
The subtle lies I wanted to believe,
There would have been your face there to deceive
Into a semblance, a bleak faithless thing
Or else a little air, a little nothing.

But long apostasy had tired my eyes
With long renunciation, till I let
Light open them. They opened: and we met
Suddenly, without semblance or disguise,
And yet were seers, prophets, visionaries.

Where was the god within the miracle?
Nowhere within the circle of our sight
Could we find room for more than our own light.
No flame or angel. Yet we both could tell
Such meeting had its fire, its Gabriel.

BERNARD BERGONZI

A Prospect of Italy

The timorous Elizabethans know him well,
the dreaded atheistic Machiavel.

Hot Italy inspired in them such awe:
a country innocent of Moral Law.

(Upon this Law, the northern races throve;
the Law within, the starry heavens above.)

Then liberal heroines set out to discover
no cozening Machiavel but manly lover.

Alas, beneath that extraverted sky
(with cynic stars) the Law turns thin and dry.

Our valued Consciousness and Conscience both,
in their grave splendour, were of northern growth.

And innocent Latins do not think, but act:
how many blue eyes yet bewail the fact?

In cooler air once more, reflect and weep:
turismo is too easy, and too cheap.

C. A. TRYPANIS

*Peirene**

Coolness lies open here,
Water, tasting of stone mosaic,
Eaves, spilling silence
Over blue dolphin's leap
Out of a pebble stream.
A world of empty doors.

Feel on the stone of flesh,
Beaked anemone breasts
Fractured in forked reflection,
Shoulders cool, the curve
Of a shell. Green flow of time
Through wet clay, reeds.

Against the fluted rock
Long muscles live with oil,
The crisp thigh licked
By a sweep of glass.
Pagan love distilled
In lilting circles
Over the indifferent faces
Of sirens and birds,
Pebbles teach silence.

Cool temple of the flesh,
' Touch nothing ', stranger.

*Fountain and baths of ancient Corinth.

MODERNITY IN POETRY

by Robert Conquest

WE find two main ways of looking at poetry nowadays. There is the academic and analytic fashion: the Leavisites laying down laws and the Empsonians popping ambiguities into their killing bottles. One of the main objections that can be raised against these people is that they not merely cannot see the wood for the trees, but even as to trees are expert only in the classification of twigs and leaves and have no idea what actually makes trees grow.

The other sort of writing about poetry has so often been exposed that it would be pathetic, if it were not scandalous, that it still needs doing. The mess of low-level romanticism left around from the 'forties still produces the same old stuff about ' poetry ' being distinguishable from good verse, and distinguishable in a particular way. From Byron to Auden critics and poets of the highest repute have shot down people who ' while looking down their nose / Call Pope and Dryden classics of our prose '. But we are still being told that verse is only ' poetry ' if it is, not merely emotive, but emotive in a high-pitched fashion, replete with self-pity and the other adolescent emotions.

I touch on these perversions merely as some explanation of why I think it worth dealing, and that rather simply, with a theme that is not very new, but which at least concerns itself with basic questions. My thesis, in brief, would be that one of the defects of these attitudes, and poetry written under their influence, is that they are deficient in the virtue of modernity.

There are fashions in poetry which are quite simply fashions and nothing else — literary moods, like that of the 1890s or 1940s, or even merely technical modes. If this is all that is meant by modern, then there is obviously no particular virtue in it. It applies mainly to the habits of poetasters, and the writers later held to be good have quite likely never bothered with it. But there is, I think, a more essential modern-ness: a literature which is really firmly rooted in the thought and feeling of its age, and that when there is a general movement of that thought and feeling. There are obviously periods when no such movement takes place, when there is either confusion or desiccation.

The only question, to my mind, is whether our own era is the sort that has a wave worth being on the crest of. I have no real doubt that it has, though the confusion and back-eddies are certainly such that one cannot blame people very much for failing to see it, and for feeling that the only thing left them is to shut themselves off or regress.

A modern in *any* period does not simply register, he inquires. He does not lie back and luxuriate in a hot tub of despair or faith, self-

hatred or self-love. His work is active, not passive. And naturally he does not simply repeat, with minor variations, enquiries which have been satisfactorily performed by his predecessors. It is not that the poet consciously chooses the new. He is impelled, from whatever point of view he starts, towards the new frontier of experience. His active attitude to his work and life provides the impulsion.

Is there a general theme in our present culture? I should say that the central advance of the present age, covering everything from mathematical physics to literature, is the many-sided research into the nature of concept, language and communication which is revealing for the first time something of the quality of the relationship between symbol and event, and thus between human beings. This problem, right at the centre of our philosophy and science, is the great dominating focus of intellectual effort and advance of our time. How can a closer grapple with any sort of reality ignore the movement of thought which is penetrating deepest into the real?

That's all very well, you may say — just conscious research. But, at the same time that philosophy and science have been creating a rigorous empiricism by examining the properties of the glass through which we see objects and each other and to a large extent ourselves, a similar abandonment of preconception has taken place in our general thought. It was George Orwell, I should think, who most incarnated the advance from reliance on *political* formulae to the touchstone of the real person and the real event. No more than in philosophy, did this imply that one thing was as good as another. The judgments of humanism were maintained. And this general movement of thought and feeling was not towards the frivolities of dilettantism. (One would not see in it any stimulus to a return to Georgian nature poetry or to avant-garde posturing, for instance.)

In fact, thinking of this sort (explicit in the work of the frontiersmen of modern thought — the semanticists and information-theory men, the cyberneticists and metalinguists, the operational philosophers and the social psychologists), is not explicit in most modern *writers*. It can be deduced from their work and is not imposed on it. Thus it is fair to conclude that it is the thought of the present, that it is the essential modernity. For it can be seen as both the conscious and the unconscious tendency of our times.

What then has the modern ' modern poet ' got in his attitude now that distinguishes him from earlier generations? As a technician perhaps very little. The experiments have been performed: the abortive majority rejected, the fruitful minority taken for granted. But if we consider the poet as a generalised person of his time, perhaps we may distinguish him from earlier times in that (a) he no longer believes in grandiose political or other systems, (b) for the first time he takes for granted (and does not need to assert either of himself or others) the

Freudian discoveries about his own motivation. (But he does not accept a psychological panacea either.) (c) he does not look for possibilities of absolute salvation or absolute doom. But (d) he does not shrug off the human condition and become a dilettante. Mr Enright speaks somewhere of modern poetry being willing to 'give the world and us the benefit of our doubtful dignity', saying also that it does 'not make large claims — for man, or life, or love, or the soul, or the body. On the other hand, it . . . does not spend its time ostentatiously making no claims whatsoever.' It is 'neither mean nor sentimental'. This suits the empirical mood. And I think that it is what is meant when modern poets are described as anti-wet and anti-phoney. It is a recognition that an attitude which filters reality through any set of political theories, psychological notions, mystical blueprints or even personal moods, and attaches more importance to the filter than to the reality, is hollow.

This is not the place to discuss in what sense art is communication or, at lowest, stimulus. All that needs to be said is that intellect, emotion and senses are useful divisions for certain purposes of what is a single process in the real human being, and that poetry cannot divide them. It works simultaneously at every level — the only symbolic structure which does this. And it is thus, semantically *and* psychologically speaking, a liberation from the moulds of preconception.

One does not want to overdo the Apollonian aspect of modern poetry. It seems more intellectual than it really is simply because it normally stands in comparison with the dionysiac extremes of the 'forties. But, while it is certainly a poetry in which the individual judgment asserts itself and preserves its integrity against the totalitarian claims of id and superego alike, it is not just a neo-classicism. It knows about angst and suffering, but sees that they do not compose the entire universe. It recognises the immediate experience of the *Allfühlung*, without being trapped by the metaphysical systems which utilise and universalise it.

What am I claiming, exactly, for the present-day poetry that I believe to be modern in a healthy sense? Much less than is usually claimed for their own methods by dithyrambists, pure lyricists, Marxists, 'experimentalists', and all the others who have produced narrow and exclusive definitions of what is good in poetry. And here we must divest ourselves of theories which create unnecessary dichotomies and parochialisms: notions that poetry *must* be metaphysical, or that it *must* not use abstract words, that a statement cannot be both direct and emotive.

Modern poetry depends less on the odd line or verse and more on the total effect. And I should like to quote whole poems — Philip Larkin's *Churchgoing*, for example, or Thom Gunn's *The Inherited Estate*, Elizabeth Jennings' *In the Night*, or John Holloway's *The Shell*.

But let me try a few bits. From Miss Jennings' *A Way of Looking*:

> ' But something plays a trick upon the scene:
> A different kind of light, a stranger colour
> Flows down on the appropriated view.
> Nothing within the mind fits. This is new.
> Thought and reflection must begin again
> To fit the image and to make it true.'

— unemotional — or full of intellectual passion?

Or something of Thom Gunn's which shows the effectiveness of direct statement and abstract words:

> . . . And set your foot upon the path that leads
> Up to the hill where Follies and façades
> — Typical products of intelligence
> That lacks brute purpose — split, disintegrate
> And, falling with their own rich weight,
> Litter the slopes, a record of expense.'

— For the same effect of control, in a very different way, we might refer to D. J. Enright's poem, *The Laughing Hyena.*

You do not find in this modern poetry any special search for verbal originality or originality of image — a search which is maintained a trifle frenetically on the outskirts. Philip Larkin, speaking of what may happen to churches after religion has died out, ends:

> ' A serious house on serious earth it is,
> In whose blent air all our compulsions rest,
> Are recognised, and robed as destinies.'

— how ordinary that ' robed ' is, but how effective.

Where one does come across original images in it they seem to arise from the central originality of concept and are not just contrived. Larkin again; he speaks of his skin and the effects on it:

> ' Of the continuous coarse
> Sand-laden wind, time.'

And one might range through the best works of Kingsley Amis, and John Holloway, and Donald Davie, and find similar examples.

These quotations are, of course, quite inadequate to prove what I will simply have to assert — that I have been generalising from the practice of a number of our better recent poets, and not attempting to impose on them a preconceived formula.

I would not deny that good poetry can be written in non-modern genres. But I would submit that ' modern ' poetry, if successful as poetry at all, is fuller, more active, and more creative. Concentrated firmly in the real person and the real event, it is clarifying and moving at the same time, and thus fulfils more adequately the broad and non-neurotic functions of art.

Seeing the Third Avenue El Go Down

(With Jan)

We stood a while to watch, arms lightly round
Each other's waist, a bit surprised (and pleased)
To be confronted suddenly ourselves
With what the papers said was going on.
Up on the station rooftop were two men
Who plainly took their job as just a job;
One had a bar of iron he shoved and wrenched
In joints and cracks to split the wood apart,
And once we saw a beam he'd pried swing down
To hang suspended from one end, as though
We'd seen an old man's arm slide off his chest
To dangle stiffly by the bed in death.
I turned and smiled a little, moved to go,
But at your quickly murmured ' Not just yet '
Resigned myself by shifting weight to stand
Some more with you, together yet apart,
Our thoughts about the sight we'd chanced upon
Dividing and adhering us at once
The way a moored boat rides beside a dock.
At that, perhaps our minds ran much the same
(Some sinister symbolic hint being plain)
But we were in the springtime of our love
And I would not allow my mood to change —
In fact, remember singing to myself
' I hate to see that good old El go down '
Which scarcely would done at all out loud.
But now, months later, sitting in my room,
With you not here to keep my mind from it,
I know the latent horror of the scene
Was in the way the wreckers did their work
And not the simple sentimental fact
The El was going — it had to go sometime —
The way they chewed unchallenged just like flies
Into an animal already dead.
Accepting change is not the point at hand
For I have long since traced that out and seen
The very act of love creates the life
Which will replace the lives that act fulfilled.
It is that change, predestined conqueror,

Must not be free to choose how it may kill
And give death definition of its own.
I do not find it hard to swear an oath
Upon the swirling rage in me for this.
The hand that wears the iron glove made for me
Had better not expect to do its work
Complacently against my heart and hand
Taught how by Hector, Roland, and the Maid;
Had better come on ready for a bout
That will give any pausing looker-on
A different memory of the day when I
Begin the last going under, like the El.

VERNON SCANNELL

Howling for Love

Howling for love in his unfriendly bed
At length he slept, grew massive in his dream
And thrashed the hairy villain with his father's face
And kissed the woman with the breasts of cream.

The soft explosion of the sunrise flung
Him gasping in the whistling world, derisions peeped
And sniggered on the window-sill:
Through sticky lashes wincing daylight seeped.

The clanging challenge of the day began.
The shawl of sun was warm as passion's breath,
The tinkling walk of women told him love,
Dark musics churned his blood to crimson wealth.

Evening was moon-drenched when he met his love.
Her breasts were smooth as pebbles and she lay
Her white unplundered beauty at his wish
Beseeching him to hold the dawn at bay.

But even as he sank at her warm side,
He knew betrayal curled on her dark head,
And cried that he had never wanted this
Howling for love in his unfriendly bed.

GABRIEL PEARSON

The Intact

Dare dream a moment I am deaf, dumb, blind,
one feeling mass unshaped into a mind,
an intellect aborted in its womb,
an insult to the earth it's fashioned from—
and now draw close me, touch me with your hands,
and with your separate warmth unseal the bands
of my unknowing, my unloving sight,
so that I feel you as a form of light:
surely my hands will flutter into eyes,
your soft pulse leap to speech; you can surprise
me then with eloquence of urgent blood
and with your heart-beats storm my solitude.
Your busy fingers will be general then,
all toil and playfulness and stir of men;
your hair will be length, strength, resilience, flow
of lines in landscape and wild things that grow;
you'll bear the laden world in one slight face
into the zero blankness of my space,
and the long hours when your lips cherish me
would form an instant in infinity.
But I can hear and so can tear your words
to tatters; and I can see, and with sharp swords
of vision stab, maim with comparisons;
my tongue's a catapult and speech of stones
batters your love, my Love: best leave me, find
some unborn being, deaf and dumb and blind,
and labour with his chaos, and leave me
dumb-worded, deaf with ears, too blind to see.

GABRIEL PEARSON

The Pursuit Abandoned

My fool in the forest, with the chaste heart,
called love, was, to my nostrils' flair,
a pulse of inhuman air.
I found her scented lair
and made her poise and start;
I was the wind that tore through her hair,
I was the quivering cold dart
in her blood, her spur and her despair.

And could I, nurtured on the chase,
exchange the blood-lust for a compassion
would keep the tacit leaves over her face
drawn, leave in her young eyes the grateful peace
I had dreamt to trace when the fire was ashen?

Oh my poor fool, your limping foe
screams at the tree-tops whose quiet screens are
remote and similar.
Wander beyond me, I have a bow
to break, and sharp heads to blunt
of arrows; in the forest waste
the unseen stars still are chaste,
and the stars cross me when I hunt.

THE POND

by Lawrence P. Spingarn

IT was already late in the summer, and now Stanwood chose the pond in preference to the white beach at the other end of their road. At first, he and Marian had gone to the beach afternoons, but the beach attracted too many others since the new road was finished. The beach, alas, was no longer the quiet refuge it had been last summer, or the summer before that. Therefore, the Stanwoods walked through the piney woods to the pond, where they could sit in the shade until it was time to swim, and where the water was much warmer after all.

'Nobody knows about the pond,' his wife Marian used to say.

'It's hidden from the highway,' Stanwood explained in his slow, tired voice.

'Just Carlotta knows,' Marian said one day. 'She won't disappoint us.'

Carlotta belonged to a house deeper in the woods than theirs, farther from the beach. When she appeared at the edge of the pond, carrying her toy pail and shovel, dressed in dirty rompers, Stanwood would get up and go to meet her. He thought that she needed his hand before she ventured on, a child of five with long brown hair in ringlets, a chubby face in which deep-set blue eyes looked gravely upon all objects, and a tiny mouth pursed to smile but never smiling.

'We'll play store,' Stanwood always suggested. 'What shall we sell today?'

No matter how hard they all tried, the store was terribly limited. Marian would empty her purse of small objects and range them on the sand while Stanwood and the child went in search of shells, pine-cones, nails and iron rings from the tumble-down icehouse. A single warped

board served for a counter. Marian and Stanwood were the only customers. And Carlotta, collecting their pennies, would push sticks, shells and pine-cones across the board in return.

And thus the afternoon, prodded by their voices and the shadows of their movements, retreated deeper into the pines. Sometimes the heron crossed the patch of sky overhead, wheeled lazily, settled on the tangled brush at the far side of the pond, where Stanwood's voice faintly carried as he told his stories. If the heron listened in shadow with the sun touching only the tips of its wings, Carlotta listened in the stillness that the pond cast over them all. Only Marian laughed aloud at Stanwood's drollery, and the heron, alarmed by the echo of that laugh, flapped its wings to warn them that the light was fading among the trees.

'It's quiet here,' Marian would say. 'Even with Carlotta, it's quiet.'

On the day Carlotta did not appear, Marian repeated only the first part of her observation, looked at Stanwood who seemed asleep, sighed for her own relief. Her finger slipped out of the book she was reading. She longed to lie down beside him, to reach out and touch the grey curls beneath the brim of his soiled canvas hat. His arm was flung across his face. His mouth was set in the sign of disappointment. The quiet lay between them in its own subtle posture.

But Stanwood was not asleep, nor even drowsy. The smooth surface of the pond engaged his shaded eyes, alerted him to the peace and calm he had sought and found. This was the third summer at the cottage, the third summer that now approached its close. In swimming, reading, walking the paths through the piney woods, he and Marian had tried ways to break their chains, to substitute one set of habits for another. They had said nothing to each other about this. Indeed, the life they shared at the cottage was taken as much for granted as their life during the winter, when Stanwood went dutifully to his office, wrote laborious briefs, attended court, visited the library. The cottage was simply the place to be when the city failed them, when the heat of pavements and small rooms was too much. And to the cottage they had brought that vague discontent, that certain sense of something missed which haunted them increasingly.

'Carlotta's gone away,' Stanwood said, moving his body as if he had just heard Marian's remark through the haze of sleep. He turned over on his side, stretched out his arms and long legs, yawned, and looked his wife full in the face.

Her face was framed by her usual restraint, held taut by the muscles of jaw and neck in its deceptive look of youth. Her hair, however, was as grey as his; the little lines at her eyes recalled their years together. It was good that they were together yet, but with each added

week and month the strain on him increased, reacting on her as well. He could see the strain in her face now, but he did not want to probe, did not want to hear the reason from Marian. Although he watched her so intently, he was thinking of the child Carlotta. Summer was more than half over; had Carlotta gone home? When Stanwood rose to his feet, Marian nodded and put out her hands to be pulled up. They collected their belongings and started off through the woods, walking some distance apart.

Next day, urged by an expectation they would not admit, the Stanwoods packed a picnic lunch and started for the pond before noon. Halfway there, he stopped and put up his hand for silence.

'I hear voices, Marian.'

She listened too, then broke into a smile he had never seen before. Her face acquired energy, purpose. The corners of her mouth did not tremble.

'It's Carlotta,' Stanwood said as they emerged at the edge of the pond.

Carlotta's father was tanned and wiry, his face a syllable in the sound of joy as he tossed her the big rubber ball, which she bounced back at him along the beach. Wind whipped at the scarf of Carlotta's mother, who sat in a nest of towels, blankets, luncheon things, her stomach big with another child. When Stanwood came up to them, he spoke first, telling his name, smiling at the child. The ball came his way. He stooped and threw it back to Carlotta. Marian, standing at a distance, nodded pleasantly, prepared to sit down beneath a pine.

'We know Carlotta,' Stanwood explained, rubbing one foot against the other, holding the tightly rolled towels awkwardly. 'We thought she'd gone home for good. Yesterday, she didn't come here, and we —'

Wind damaged the answer Carlotta's father made; Stanwood bent his head, looked helplessly at Carlotta's mother. She was a smiling, pleasant-seeming woman; her face, unlike Marian's, was smooth and relaxed, gone to flesh with the pregnancy that sat so happily upon her. The woman said something to him, something that Stanwood promptly forgot, for he began to watch the ball, then the tiny caps that the wind made on the surface of the pond. Carlotta and her father went on playing. The ball did not come Stanwood's way again, nor did he ask for it. His smile vanished and he turned away feeling the chilly wind upon his neck.

He sat by Marian's side unable to read, forced to watch Carlotta and listen to her chatter. Marian had already stripped down to her bathing suit. In a moment, he would do the same, and take a dip before lunch. For the first time that summer Stanwood felt the need for solace, but when he reached out to touch Marian's hand, the barren

look in her eyes stopped him. He dropped his arm and dug his fingers into the sand.

'It's getting colder,' Stanwood observed. 'Feel the change, Marian?'

'Yes, dear. I feel the change.'

They took their dip fifty feet from Carlotta and her parents. Now Carlotta's father bore her on his shoulders, a splinter of a young man marching toward the sun, chanting as he marched, with Carlotta clutching his hair and shouting in sheer wantonness. Stanwood turned his head from Marian, whose eyes still followed the child. He bent down, made cups of his hands, splashed Marian as he used to do not many years ago.

'Silly!' Marian said, her smile trying to break through the gathering worry in her face. 'What brought that on?'

They were reclining in the shade after lunch, their bodies touching faithfully, their skin still damp from the pond. It was not a time for action. It was too early for the heron to return to its resting place. And Carlotta was playing with the ball, her cries enfeebled by the wind that brought the ocean smell inland.

'Ball! Ball!' Carlotta screamed suddenly, and more loudly.

Stanwood sat up with a start, shaded his eyes, knew what Carlotta meant. The big rubber ball had bounced off the beach into the pond, where the wind was spinning it along. Stanwood got up and quickly threw off his robe. It was only a few feet to the water, yet Stanwood ran there. Plunging flat ahead, he began swimming in the direction of the ball, which seemed to be heading toward him.

Of course, his action was unnecessary. The ball would have drifted again to shore, gotten caught in weeds, and stayed caught until fetched. Carlotta's father had not gone into the water, and Stanwood watched him as he swam. The young man had picked her up and was holding her high; she was waving to Stanwood now, waving both arms and chortling. Marian, he noted, was strolling languidly to the water's edge, as if he had done nothing out of the common. Stanwood again faced the ball, which was almost within reach, which the wind was kicking gaily.

There! He had it! But no, the wet ball slipped from his grasp, went bobbing along a foot, then a yard away. Stanwood gasped, twisted in the water as his muscles refused him help. When he reared up and flung himself forward, the ball gave a little jump, and Stanwood sank beneath the surface. Water filled his ears, eyes, mouth. He came up thrashing, blinded for a moment. His eyes cleared, and he realised that he was half-way across the pond, the pond that had seemed so small from the shore. He thought he heard his name, but he would not turn his head. No, it would not do to look behind him, for there was the ball, just a little way ahead, just a few inches more . . . Stanwood,

sinking a second time, shouted his own name, as if the sound of it could save him.

Going down, he recalled the green depths of his days, the unexplored channels darkened forever by narrow routine, the petty discipline of habit. He was drugged by the effort to keep afloat, to gain time for thinking and feeling, and now he welcomed the tides of sleep that he had held off so long. Even Marian did not matter here. Could she awaken from her own stupor, smile at him as once she had from the fullness of their earlier life? No, she could only stare at him from the grey mask of her face, powerless to help him, to lift the weight of water from his shoulders. His feet touched bottom, felt the cold springs that fed the pond. He opened his eyes, lifted his arms higher, caught the image of the sun through layers of darkness. When his head broke the surface and air rushed painfully into his chest, Stanwood flung out his arms and gripped the ball with the last of his strength.

The pond and its surrounding woods were very still. Calm and smooth, the water traced little wrinkles around him as Stanwood floated shoreward on the supporting ball. When he dared look toward the beach, it was as he had supposed. Marian was talking to the parents of Carlotta, who was digging in the pebbly sand, filling her pail with the grains of innocence itself. Nobody had watched him struggling for the ball, least of all Carlotta. And Marian, after one look at him swimming out there, had turned her back . . . Recovering his strength by degrees, Stanwood kicked his legs, paddled with one arm like a lazy swimmer who enjoys the sun, the silence, the wide arc of the sky. When he reached the edge of the water, he crawled the rest of the way along the sand, pushing the ball ahead of him, making a game of his obscurity.

'There!' he said when the others noticed him at last. 'There, Carlotta. I've saved your ball —'

'Play with the man, darling.' Carlotta's mother pleaded. 'Show him how nice you can play.'

Stanwood was the only one smiling now. Even Marian grew embarrassed at his action, coaxed the child to play with him. But Carlotta, gravely shaking her head, went on filling the pail.

'Let her alone,' Stanwood said. 'Besides, I don't feel like playing.'

He smiled with the best face he could, kicked the forgotten ball out of his way, and went up the beach to find his towel. A few moments later, when Marian approached him, he was staring at the place in the pond where he had nearly drowned. How calm and smooth it was now, how peaceful and deceptive! And just then the heron flew by with a fish in its mouth, settling on the far pile of brush to feed in its own solitude.

MIRRORS, FOUNTAINS AND TELESCOPES

New Lines — an Anthology, edited by Robert Conquest. (Macmillan's, 15/-.)

THE work of all the poets represented in this anthology — Miss Jennings, Messrs. Amis, Conquest, Davie, Enright, Gunn, Holloway, Larkin and Wain — has already appeared separately. Mr Conquest, who has edited this collection, and who provides a short introduction, offers it as representative of a general tendency in poetry — the central trend of the 'fifties. He would claim that these poets have in common no more than the aim of rational structure, comprehensible language and a 'determination to avoid bad principles'. One can surely assume that no poet ever wrote on what he believed to be bad principles, but we know what Mr Conquest means: it is gratifying to recognise in the work of these poets that critical self-awareness and vitally necessary reliance on a basic intellectual structure, which so many bad poets fail to attain or to acknowledge as important.

But if such an intellectual structure, contributing to the complexity and coherence — and so to the maturity — of the experience a poem contains, may be almost a poetic necessity, it is not, of course, enough. The obvious danger inherent in this poetry that aims at being intelligent and intelligible is that it may achieve no more than the production of a skeleton, of some faint academic interest, rather than a living organism. However, this well selected anthology shows this poetry at its best, and clearly refutes the accusations of dull conformity of theme and method that have been directed against the poets involved, perhaps involuntarily, in this tendency.

The misunderstanding about the emotional intensity of this poetry seems to have been due to a failure to perceive that in avoiding the mere indulgence of extreme and disordered emotions, the best of this poetry is not in fact retreating from them, but attempting, without the aid of any pre-conceptions, to define them more clearly. What is shared is the somewhat detached tone, the unwillingness to resort to extravagance of gesture in diction, imagery or assertion. At its worst it tends to be anaemic, over-reticent, hypnotised by the minute movements of its own analytic activities.

Fortunately there is none of this in the present collection. Miss Jennings, so scrupulously exploring the relationship of subject and object, is sometimes in danger of achieving no more than the bare statement of a simple philosophical problem, a bareness to which the restraint of her rhythmic organisation only lends itself. But here we have some of the best of her poems, in which the same ideas are successfully extended to examination of genuine human situations, as in, for example, the fine poem, *Identity*:

> For making friends means this —
> Image and passion combined into a whole
> Pattern within the loving mind, not her or his
> Concurring there. You can project the full
> Picture of lover or friend that is not either.

The poetry of Thom Gunn, who on the strength of this contribution seems the most technically accomplished poet represented, indicates the true range of theme and method in this anthology; he is in fact preoccupied with the

problem which seems fated to arise in any discussion of this poetry — the opposition of intellect and instinct. The words 'movement' and 'motion' recur in his verse, representing what calculation and the 'baffled sense Or the dull thunder of approximate words' cannot achieve. This tension is at the heart of his best poems (which are amongst the finest in the book) — *On the Move, Merlin in the Cave,* and *The Inherited Estate.* In this last poem he confronts the 'typical products of intelligence that lacks brute purpose' with the activity of the seed:

> Its art is merely holding to the earth —
> But see how confidently, from its birth,
> Its branches, lifting above failures, keep
> Vigour within the discipline of shape.

In some of the other poets, 'discipline of shape' seems to inhibit some of the vigour: commendable critical self-awareness can become something like self-consciousness. In John Wain's poetry the formal or even public tone, the reliance on rigid forms, suggests occasionally that the restraint has a nervous basis, which reveals itself further in the imperfectly integrated colloquialisms or the rather foolish and unnecessary title of an otherwise successful poem on Keats and Fanny Brawne.

Like Wain, Donald Davie always demands respect, even if he does not always gain the full acquiescence of the reader: self-distrust underlies much of his verse. One may compare with Wain's *Reason for not writing Orthodox Nature Poetry,* which seems the most evasive of reasons, Davie's:

> But how the shameful grapes and olives swell,
> Excrescent from no cornucopia, tart,
> Too near to oozing to be handled well.

In fact, in Davie's poetry we are nearest to evasion of some issues: 'A neutral tone is nowadays preferred'. But using that neutral tone, and within his self-imposed limits, he has written some impressive verse: *Woodpigeons at Rahenny* in particular from this selection.

Wain, Davie, and Kingsley Amis are the three poets least inclined to commit themselves, Amis being most effective when ironic. He also provides what is the nearest we are likely to get to a manifesto for 'New Lines' in *Against Romanticism*:

> Better, of course, if images were plain,
> Warnings clearly said, shapes put down quite still
> Within the fingers' reach, or else nowhere;
> But complexities crowd the simplest thing,
> And flaw the surface that they cannot break.
> Let us make at least visions that we need . . .

Amis, like most of these poets, is frequently concerned with problems of language and communication. Mr Conquest claims as one of the recommendations of these poets their contact with contemporary philosophy, which is all very well as long as it is remembered that philosophy in itself has never made poetry either good or bad.

The empirical approach to experience in Philip Larkin's poetry is pursued not so much intellectually as almost dramatically. It would be dangerous to

assert that this is in any way a more 'poetical' method; but Larkin's poetry, more than that of any other in this book, has the capacity for gaining our confidence, for successfully integrating the colloquial, for centring a poem in an everyday situation and letting it work out its own implications, simply and unpretentiously, without being either naive or vague. If it is claimed for this poetry that it is willing to be contemporary, then Larkin gives the most accurate account of contemporary life and the most immediate and valuable reaction to it. For example, a re-reading of his already celebrated *Church Going* only confirms one's opinion that this is a very good poem, beautifully conducted from its hesitant, awkward opening to the intensely felt but disciplined assertion of the conclusion, the verse movement powerfully reinforcing the progress of the thought.

Of the remaining poets, D. J. Enright's contribution, though brilliant in its way, does not yet convince one that his considerable faculties have so far been fully engaged. Robert Conquest's enquiries into the nature of the poetic process seem occasionally a little naive, but generally his verse has both the strength and sensitivity which characterise the best of this poetry. John Holloway, wearing his influences more openly than the others, has contributed at least two notable poems, *Elegy for an Estrangement* and *Warning to a Guest*, which suggest that when he has worked out a fully personal method we may expect some considerable poetry from him.

This is, in fact, an important and valuable anthology, to be recommended to anyone who requires from poetry more than large vagueness and lazy indulgence of easy emotions. Moreover, these are still relatively new poets, tough explorers whose directions must be important to anyone interested in the progress of poetry in the next two decades. Strenuous it may be, but it is always aiming at the definition and clarification of the immediate problems of our age and culture, with the language used as precisely and penetratingly as possible.

The Eighteenth Century described the process of poetry by means of the image of the mirror held up to nature; the Romantics, by the image of the overflowing fountain. Perhaps these latest poets suggest occasionally a view through the wrong end of a telescope: but this is a mistake experience will easily rectify, for the instrument and the standpoint are well established: the method rightly used must lead to the qualities of clarity, accurate focus of contemporary problems, economy of effort and no deception, at a time when the mirror seems to offer no valuable perspective, and the fountain to be running dry, or gushing from suspicious sources.

Roger Lonsdale

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